

IN THE WATER COURT OF THE STATE OF MONTANA
UPPER MISSOURI DIVISION
WILLOW CREEK BASIN (41N)
PRELIMINARY DECREE

CLAIMANT: Montana State Board of Land Commissioners

CASE: 41N-0416-R-2023

41N 18403-00

OBJECTOR: Montana State Board of Land Commissioners

41N 18410-00

NOTICE OF FILING OF MASTER'S REPORT

This Master's Report was filed with the Montana Water Court on the above stamped date. Please review this report carefully.

You may file a written objection to this Master's Report within **10 days** of the stamped date if you disagree or find errors with the Master's findings of fact, conclusions of law, or recommendations. Rule 23, W.R.Adj.R. If the Master's Report was mailed to you, the Montana Rules of Civil Procedure allow an additional 3 days be added to the 10-day objection period. Rule 6(d), M.R.Civ.P. If you file an objection, you must serve a copy of the objection to all parties on the service list found at the end of the Master's Report. The original objection and a certificate of mailing to all parties on the service list must be filed with the Water Court.

If you do not file a timely objection, the Water Court will conclude that you agree with the content of this Master's Report.

MASTER'S REPORT

All water right claims that appeared in the Preliminary Decree for Willow Creek (Basin 41N) were subject to "issue remarks" resulting from pre-decree examination by the DNRC, objections, and counterobjections.

Claims 41N 18403-00 and 41N 18410-00 were consolidated into Case 41N-0416-R-2022 to resolve the issue remarks.

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. Claim 41N 18403-00 received issue remarks from the DNRC stating that:

IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE DNRC MEMORANDUM OF NOVEMBER 12, 1987, A CLERICAL CORRECTION HAS BEEN MADE TO CHANGE THE DECREED SOURCE TO A DNRC STANDARD SOURCE DESCRIPTION. BECAUSE THIS CORRECTION WAS NOT INCLUDED ON THE OBJECTION LIST, ANY WATER USER WHOSE RIGHT MAY BE ADVERSLY AFFECTED BY ENFORCEMENT OF THIS CHANGE MAY PETITION THE APPROPRIATE COURT FOR RELIEF OR MAY FILE AN OBJECTION AT THE PRELIMINARY DECREE.

THE CLAIMED SOURCE MAY BE QUESTIONABLE. BASED ON AVAILABLE DATE, THE SOURCE MAY BE SURFACE WATER FROM UNNAMED TRIBUTARY OF CROOKED COULEE.

- Claim 41N 18410-00 received issue remarks from the DNRC stating that:

EXISTENCE OF THE CLAIMED RESERVOIR CANNOT BE CONFIRMED WITH AVAILABLE DATA.

2. On August 2, 2018, Claimant Montana State Board of Land Commissioners/Trust Land Management Division filed an Objection accompanied by a Verified Motion to Amend the source name for claim 41N 18403-00 to Unnamed Tributary of Crooked Coulee. Similarly, Claimant filed an Objection and Verified Motion to Amend to amend the means of diversion to “livestock direct from source” and to amend the point of diversion and place of use to the W2 of Sec 30, Twp 32N, Rge 2E for claim 41N 18410-00 as well as remove the reservoir record.

3. On January 13, 2023, the Court set a filing deadline for Claimant to file any additional information or evidence needed to resolve the above-listed issue remarks. Nothing was filed by the ordered deadline.

PRINCIPLES OF LAW

1. A properly filed Statement of Claim for an existing water right is prima facie proof of its content. Section 85-2-227, MCA; Rule 10, W.R.Adj.R.

2. Prima facie proof may be contradicted and overcome by a preponderance of the evidence. Rule 19, W.R.Adj.R.

3. A preponderance of the evidence is evidence that shows a fact is “more probable than not.” *Hohenlohe v. State*, 2010 MT 203, ¶ 33, 357 Mont. 438, 240 P.3d 628.

4. If prima facie status is overcome, the burden shifts back to the claimant to demonstrate historical use. *79 Ranch v. Pitsch*, 204 Mont. 426, 432-33, 666 P.2d 215, 218 (1983).

5. Section 85-2-248(2), MCA, requires that the Water Court resolve all issue remarks that are not resolved through the objection process. *See also* Rule 7, W.R.Adj.R.

6. The Water Court may use information submitted by the DNRC, the Statement of Claim, and any other data obtained by the Court to evaluate a water right. Sections 85-2-227, -231(2), MCA.

7. When resolving issue remarks, the Water Court must weigh the information resulting in the issue remark and the issue remark against the claimed water right. Section 85-2-247(2), MCA. The factual evidence on which an issue remark is based must meet the preponderance of evidence standard before the prima facie status of a claim is overcome. 43Q 200996-00 et al., Order Establishing Volume and Order Closing Case, at 18, June 8, 2015.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

1. The information in the record is sufficient to resolve the above-listed issue remarks appearing on the claims. Claimant’s *Motions to Amend*, along with the fact that they did not provide additional information or evidence regarding the proposed amendments, shows by a preponderance that the above-listed elements for claims 41N 18403-00 and 41N 18410-00 should be amended as described in Finding of Fact No. 2. These amendments resolve the objections and issue remarks, and the issue remarks should be removed from the claim.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the foregoing Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law, this Master recommends that the Court adopt the changes as outlined above.

Post decree abstracts of the water right claims reflecting the recommended changes are attached to this Report.

ELECTRONICALLY SIGNED AND DATED BELOW.

Service Via Electronic Mail:

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**POST DECREE
ABSTRACT OF WATER RIGHT CLAIM
WILLOW CREEK
BASIN 41N**

Water Right Number: 41N 18403-00 STATEMENT OF CLAIM

Version: 3 -- POST DECREE

Status: ACTIVE

Owners: MONTANA STATE BOARD OF LAND COMMISSIONERS
TRUST LAND MANAGEMENT DIVISION
PO BOX 201601
HELENA, MT 59620 1601

Priority Date: APRIL 15, 1945

Type of Historical Right: USE

Purpose (use): STOCK

Flow Rate: A SPECIFIC FLOW RATE HAS NOT BEEN DECREED FOR THIS USE FROM THIS ONSTREAM RESERVOIR. THE FLOW RATE IS LIMITED TO THE MINIMUM AMOUNT HISTORICALLY NECESSARY TO SUSTAIN THIS PURPOSE.

Volume: THIS RIGHT INCLUDES THE AMOUNT OF WATER CONSUMPTIVELY USED FOR STOCK WATERING PURPOSES AT THE RATE OF 30 GALLONS PER DAY PER ANIMAL UNIT. ANIMAL UNITS SHALL BE BASED ON REASONABLE CARRYING CAPACITY AND HISTORICAL USE OF THE AREA SERVICED BY THIS WATER SOURCE.

Source Name: UNNAMED TRIBUTARY OF CROOKED COULEE

Source Type: SURFACE WATER

Point of Diversion and Means of Diversion:

<u>ID</u>	<u>Govt Lot</u>	<u>Qtr Sec</u>	<u>Sec</u>	<u>Twp</u>	<u>Rge</u>	<u>County</u>
1		SWSENE	36	34N	1W	TOOLE

Period of Diversion: JANUARY 1 TO DECEMBER 31

Diversion Means: DAM

***Reservoir:** ONSTREAM

<u>Govt Lot</u>	<u>Qtr Sec</u>	<u>Sec</u>	<u>Twp</u>	<u>Rge</u>	<u>County</u>
	SWSENE	36	34N	1W	TOOLE

Diversion to Reservoir: DIVERSION # 1

Period of Use: JANUARY 1 TO DECEMBER 31

Place of Use:

<u>ID</u>	<u>Acres</u>	<u>Govt Lot</u>	<u>Qtr Sec</u>	<u>Sec</u>	<u>Twp</u>	<u>Rge</u>	<u>County</u>
1			SWSENE	36	34N	1W	TOOLE

**POST DECREE
ABSTRACT OF WATER RIGHT CLAIM
WILLOW CREEK
BASIN 41N**

Water Right Number: 41N 18410-00 STATEMENT OF CLAIM

Version: 3 -- POST DECREE

Status: ACTIVE

Owners: MONTANA STATE BOARD OF LAND COMMISSIONERS
TRUST LAND MANAGEMENT DIVISION
PO BOX 201601
HELENA, MT 59620 1601

Priority Date: JULY 10, 1941

Type of Historical Right: FILED

Purpose (use): STOCK

Flow Rate: A SPECIFIC FLOW RATE HAS NOT BEEN DECREED FOR THIS USE FROM THIS ONSTREAM RESERVOIR. THE FLOW RATE IS LIMITED TO THE MINIMUM AMOUNT HISTORICALLY NECESSARY TO SUSTAIN THIS PURPOSE.

Volume: THIS RIGHT INCLUDES THE AMOUNT OF WATER CONSUMPTIVELY USED FOR STOCK WATERING PURPOSES AT THE RATE OF 30 GALLONS PER DAY PER ANIMAL UNIT. ANIMAL UNITS SHALL BE BASED ON REASONABLE CARRYING CAPACITY AND HISTORICAL USE OF THE AREA SERVICED BY THIS WATER SOURCE.

Source Name: WEST FORK WILLOW CREEK

Source Type: SURFACE WATER

Point of Diversion and Means of Diversion:

<u>ID</u>	<u>Govt Lot</u>	<u>Qtr Sec</u>	<u>Sec</u>	<u>Twp</u>	<u>Rge</u>	<u>County</u>
1		W2	30	32N	2E	TOOLE

Period of Diversion: JANUARY 1 TO DECEMBER 31

Diversion Means: LIVESTOCK DIRECT FROM SOURCE

Period of Use: JANUARY 1 TO DECEMBER 31

Place of Use:

<u>ID</u>	<u>Acres</u>	<u>Govt Lot</u>	<u>Qtr Sec</u>	<u>Sec</u>	<u>Twp</u>	<u>Rge</u>	<u>County</u>
1			W2	30	32N	2E	TOOLE